

DATE: February 20, 2025

TO: Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Co-Chair Frederick
Co-Chair Emerson Levy
Senator Anderson
Senator Gorsek

Representative Breese-Iverson
Representative Hartman
Representative Lively
Representative Owens

FROM: Oregon Water Partnership

RE: **SB 5543 (OWRD 2025-27 Budget)** – Water management for a sustainable future

Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair Levy, and Members of the Subcommittee,

Oregon Water Partnership (OWP) supports investments in foundational water management and a modern understanding of water availability to enable Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) to accomplish its mission.

OWP is a diverse partnership of statewide conservation groups with a common goal: to advocate for balanced water policies that ensure cold clean water to sustain healthy communities, livelihoods, and ecosystems. Our priorities for the 2025 legislative session are to build resilience for Oregon's water future, bring water data into the 21st century, support smart water management, and protect and restore our waters.

Underinvestment and lack of capacity within OWRD has led to over-allocation of water rights, with resulting threats to fish and wildlife, drinking water, and agricultural economies. As drought becomes more frequent and precipitation patterns shift, water management is becoming more complex and contentious. As such, it is critical to Oregon's water future to fund OWRD.

We have reviewed OWRD's Agency Request Budget and the Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB). We have also reviewed posted water bills that will have fiscals. With the many requests being made, we urge the Subcommittee to prioritize resources needed for natural resource agencies, including OWRD. Given the profound uncertainty around federal dollars, Oregon's budget must invest to protect what makes Oregon, Oregon.

While each of our organizations has its own priorities and perspectives on other components of OWRD's 2025-27 budget, **we are united in supporting the following investments in the OWRD budget to benefit nature and people in Oregon:**

- **Maintain OWRD's Current Service Level** – Maintaining current service levels is of paramount importance. A recent Advisory Report by Oregon's Secretary of State concluded that "...natural resource agencies lack funding and capacity to properly enact their duties."¹ While we have seen an increase in investments in OWRD in recent years, the agency still does not have the full capacity to meet all their statutory mandates. Now is not the time to reduce capacity within OWRD.
- **Add back Package 090 Reductions related to data and services (\$2,521,000 GF):** Water data is the cornerstone of responsible water management. Investments in data collection and analysis in the past two biennia have helped, but the 2025 GRB proposes to hobble momentum by cutting critical funding for data fundamentals, including \$114k in evapotranspiration funding, \$100k in agrimet funding, \$769k in groundwater investigation funding, \$272k in gaging station funding, \$1m in complex facilitation funding and \$66k in water measurement cost share funds. Please restore these funds as well as the \$200k in services/supplies in Package 090.



¹ Oregon Secretary of State [Report 2023-04](#), January 2023.

- **Partial funding of Package 090 Additions (\$4.46m GF):** We support additions for:
 - (1) One time investment of \$100k GF for planning funds in Information and Technology for a Water Use Tracking and Reporting system.
 - (2) One time investment of \$4.36 million to assist the Department with legal cost overruns anticipated to carry forward from the current biennium.
- **Modernization of IT:**
 - **Package 107, Strategic Modernization of IT Systems and Tools (\$251k GF):** Modern IT is a foundational piece of agency operations and is critically important to agency strategic objectives. Updating IT will help agency staff, water right holders and the public. It will make the agency more efficient and data more accessible. We cannot overstate how important it is to fund this work.
 - **Package 111, Improving Accessibility of Agency Website (\$128k GF):** This package would add 0.5 FTE to ensure the OWRD website is up to date with information desired by the public, as well as ensuring transparency and accessibility.
 - **Additional IT Needs:** While we support Packages 107 and 111, we also understand they do not encompass all of the agency's IT needs. OWRD's IT Strategic Plan lists additional needs. We urge the Subcommittee to fund its full implementation.
<https://www.oregon.gov/owrd/WRDReports/OWRD%20IT%20Strategic%20Plan%2024-29.pdf>
- **Package 106, American Rescue Plan Act Carryover (\$3.35 m OF):** This package carries over ARPA funding authorized in the 2021-23 budget. This money will fund place based planning, engineering services for flood methodology and inundation assessments, surface and groundwater data collection field equipment, Ordnance Project in Umatilla County, and funding for the water measurement cost share program.
- **Package 110, State Scenic Waterway Revenue Gap (\$0 total funds (\$290k GF; (290k OF)):** This package will support the agency's state Scenic Waterway work. It backfills six existing split funded positions with general fund in amounts above contracted amount with OPRD.
- **Add groundwater study funds (investigations, observation wells and water budgets) removed in the 2023-2025 budget development process (\$447,830 GF):** Sustainable groundwater management is critical to Oregon's water future. In addition to restoring Package 090 Reductions to groundwater studies (\$769k), we urge the Subcommittee to add back cuts applied in the 2023-2025 budget process that would fund cooperative groundwater basin studies, groundwater data, and the construction and maintenance of observation wells that assist the Department in developing a better understanding of groundwater levels statewide.

Funding these items will build upon prior investments in the agency, and help OWRD achieve its goals to “directly address Oregon’s water supply needs” and “restore and protect streamflows and watersheds to ensure the long-term sustainability of Oregon’s ecosystems, economy, and quality of life.”

Members of OWP have supported investments in OWRD during the 2021 and 2023 Regular Sessions related to improving the agency’s use of water data and capacity for responsible water management. **We strongly support funding that will build upon these prior investments.**

Thank you for considering our request to fund these critical needs, and please contact us with questions.

Oregon Water Partnership contacts:

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